DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 219 218 RC 013 541

AUTHOR Dreier, William H.
TITLE The Joining of School Districts In Iowa Since 1966 or Fifteen Years of School Combination Without State Compulsion.
PUB DATE Mar 82
NOTE 14p.; Map of Public School Districts marginally legible.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Community Control; Elementary Secondary Education; Government Role; Local Issues; Rural Population; *School District Reorganization; Small Schools; *State Action; Trend Analysis
IDENTIFIERS *Iowa; People United for Rural Education

ABSTRACT

Although 1951-1966 marked 15 of the most dynamic, hectic, painful, and questionable years of Iowa school district reorganization, 28 school district reorganizations have come about in the succeeding 15 years without a state law or Department of Public Instruction regulation mandating the elimination of certain kinds or sizes of local school districts. A lobbying group called People United for Rural Education has been one of the most significant factors in allowing local school districts and their citizens to make their own decisions about reorganization. The 28 local education agencies (LEAs) which joined in the last 15 years came from 15 counties and 19 Area Education Agencies. The joining high schools were generally 10 miles or less from each other. All of the 28 LEAs had gone through 1 reorganization. The need for a K-12 enrollment of 300 students does not seem a significant factor, at present, in the creating or keeping of schools. About two-thirds of the LEA decisions to join came in the last 5 years. Among the many pressures which will continue to bring about additional combinations in the next 5 years are declining birthrate, inflation, limited curricular and other learning experiences and parental attitudes. (BRR)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED219218

THE JOINING OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN IOWA SINCE 1966

OR

FIFTEEN YEARS OF SCHOOL COMBINATION WITHOUT STATE COMPULSION

William H. Dreier

University of Northern Iowa

March 1982

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

William H. Dreier

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

- ✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
- ☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

RC 013541

AUG 1982
RECEIVED
ERIC/CRESS

THE JOINING OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN IOWA SINCE 1966

OR

FIFTEEN YEARS OF SCHOOL COMBINATION WITHOUT STATE COMPULSION

William H. Dreier

University of Northern Iowa

March 1982

Just 15 years ago, peace and quiet came to all the local boards of education and Iowa citizens. The final phase of the community school movement came when in 1965 the 61st General Assembly had passed legislation requiring all areas of the state to become a part of a legally constituted school district maintaining a high school by July 1, 1966.(1) Combining of school districts had become a live option in 1951, just 15 years earlier when the 54th General Assembly had repealed the moratorium on school district reorganization.(2)

Then in 1953 the state legislature eliminated chapter 276 on consolidation and set up steps to create new units to be known as a Community School District. In 1957 the General Assembly had mandated all areas in the state to be a part of a high school district by July 1, 1962.(3) Hanson said that in 1950-51 the total number of Iowa school districts was 4,652,(4) and the Iowa Educational Directory for 1980-81 says 4,558 districts existed in 1953. By 1962 the number of school taxing units had changed to 1,364 and by July 1, 1966 there were 455 districts with high schools and 46 elementary units remained which had to be attached by action of the county boards of education.(5)

What has happened to Iowa school district reorganization in these 15 years following the 15 most dynamic, hectic, painful, and (Sher would say) questionable years(6) of school district reorganization? In the early ten years between 1966 and 1976 ten K-12 districts in five counties joined and in the later period of five years, eighteen K-12 districts

in 10 counties voted to combine their tax base and high schools. Before looking at these districts, a word must be said about an event which had much to do with the fact that these reorganizations came without a state law or DPI regulation mandating the elimination of certain kinds or sizes of local school districts.

In early 1977 legislation was introduced in the Iowa General Assembly which would have required the consolidation of all schools in the state serving fewer than 300 students.(7) This brought 12 housewives and four educators together with hundreds of others at a public hearing in Des Moines. The bill was defeated. In the process, the twelve plus four founded People United for Rural Education, which has grown to 3,000 volunteers in Iowa, 26 other states and three foreign countries.(8) An early P.U.R.E. state and national resolution identified as item #5: School Reorganizations (Consolidation), states: "We believe that local communities should have the right and responsibility to decide the size of schools they want their children to attend.... We oppose reorganization of school district boundaries."

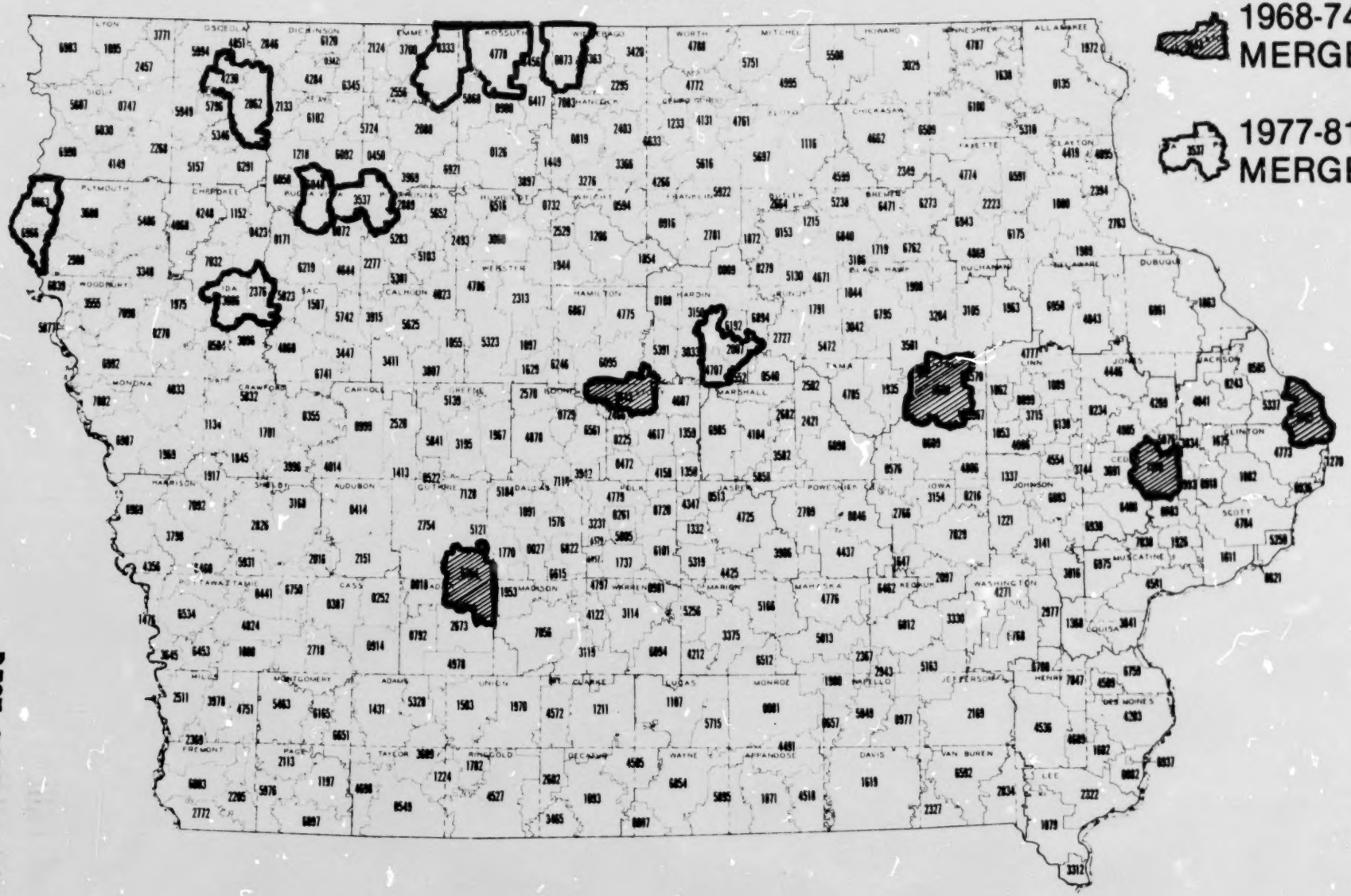
The P.U.R.E. state/national meetings each February or March, and their publications and their work as a lobby group with each Iowa General Assembly has been one of the most significant factors in allowing the Local School District and its citizens to make their own decision about reorganization. This paper examines the district combinations which have taken place in the last 15 years. The early 10 before the attempted legislation and the late 14. The location and characteristics of these 28 high school districts, population of their town, and their K-12 present and future enrollments will be the focus of this article.

The 28 LEA's which combined to form 14 community school districts between 1966 and 1981 were located in 15 different counties and in 10 of the states fifteen Area Education Agencies. On the average the high schools which joined were 7.4 miles apart

PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Iowa Department of Public Instruction

Data Analysis and Statistics Section



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

with the extremes ranging from 5 to 12 miles. Ten towns had no other public high in Iowa within ten miles and 18 had one or more public high schools within a 10 mile radius in addition to the high school they joined. Two county seat towns were among the 28 towns, one, with 1980 population of 5,043, was in the early group and the second, with 3,152 people, was in the second group. The majority of the towns whose high schools merged had a population which ranged between 250 and 717. The extremes were 197 and 1,004 and median population was 407.

The average 1980 population of the smaller town was quite different in the two time periods. Table I reports the first five small towns which combined had a mean population of 672 compared with 324 for the other 9 towns. The same trend and difference is found among the larger towns, with the five between 1966-76 averaging a population of 2,173, compared with 1,504 for the nine combining with smaller towns in 1977-81 time period.

TABLE I

COMPARISONS OF UNITS COMBINING IN 1966-76 WITH THOSE IN 1977-81, AND THE TOTAL GROUP

	Early Group 1966-76	Late Group 1977-81	Total Group 1966-81
Number of Districts	10	18	28
Average Number of Miles Between Joined High Schools	6.4	8	7.4
Average 1980 Population of Smaller Town	672	324	448
Average 1980 Population of Larger Town	2,173	1,504	1,742
Average K-12 Enrollment of Smaller Unit	294	184	223
Average K-12 Enrollment of Larger Unit	794	524	621

At the time the two districts were combined, the smaller LEA had an average K-12 enrollment of 294 compared with 184 for the nine which joined with a larger unit between 1977-81. Table I also reports the K-12 average enrollment for the larger LEA was 794 between 1966-76 and 524 between 1977-81.

The state of Iowa's total population in 1970 increased 2.4 percent over 1960[9] and 3.0 percent in 1980 over 1970.[10] In an early story about the 1980 census one newspaper reported that 49 of Iowa's smallest 101 communities reported more people in 1980 than 1970.[11] What kind of population growth occurred in the 28 towns of this report? Comparing their 1960 and 1980 populations, 15 or 53.6 percent of the towns gained some in this twenty year period. On the average did the total population of these towns increase the expected 2.4 plus 3.0 for a total of 5.4 percent (state average) over the twenty year period?

Table II reports the average 1960 population for all towns was 1,035 and in 1980 was 1,095; a bit more than the expected growth of 1,091. The early 10 towns were larger and increased to 1,421, compared with an expected 1,307. The 18 towns combining school districts in the last five years actually lost populations on the average going from 921 to 914 people. One of the characteristics of the towns combining since 1977 is not only their population was smaller (921 compared with 1,240), but between 1960 and 1980 the growth of the town, no matter if the place maintained only an elementary - middle school or a high school, was not up to the state's 5.4 percent growth.

TABLE II

AVERAGE POPULATION IN 1960 AND 1980; ACTUAL AND EXPECTED OF IOWA TOWNS INVOLVED IN LEA's JOINING BETWEEN 1966 TO 1981.

Groups or Places	Average Population		
	Actual 1960	Actual 1980	Expected 5.4% Growth
All 28 towns	1,035	1,095	1,091
Early 10 1966-76	1,240	1,421	1,307
Later 18 1977-81	921	914	970
Places Maintaining Elementary or Middle Schools			
All 14 towns	451	448	475
Early 5 towns	625	672	659
Later 9 towns	354	324	373
Places Maintaining Secondary Schools			
All 14 towns	1,619	1,742	1,706
Early 5 towns	1,855	2,170	1,955
Later 9 towns	1,488	1,504	1,568
Places Without Schools in 1981			
Early - one town	421	405	
Later - one town	187	197	
Both places	304	301	320

Two towns will not be operating any public shcool in the fall of 1981. One is in the early and the other in the later group. In the twenty year census report period, one town increased by 10 and the other decreased by 16. Their average population in

1980 was 301, below the 320 expected with the state's average growth rate. Among the 12 towns with an elementary or middle school are five places whose 1980 population was less than 300.

Finally what was and may be the K-12 enrollments of these 14 joined districts? Table III compares the enrollments reported in 1967 and 1977 with the enrollments which Truesdell predicts in 1982 and 1987.(12) The average K-12 enrollments ranged from 192 to 1,759 in 1967 for the individual LEAs. The joint enrollments in 1967 of the 14 new units which were formed in the fifteen year period, ranged from 576 to 1,987 with the mean at 1,013. Twenty years later (in 1987-88) Truesdell predicts these same units will have enrollments ranging from 324 and 1,338 and the average for the now 14 districts will be 593.

TABLE III

AVERAGE AND PREDICTED K-12 ENROLLMENTS OF THE JOINED DISTRICTS

	MEAN K-12 ENROLLMENT			
	Actual		Predicted*	
	1967-68	1977-78	1982-82	1987-8
All 14 Combined Units	1,013	791	646	593
For Early 5 Units	1,084	938	787	745
For Later 9 Units	974	709	568	508

*Truesdell, Wayne P. A Study of Iowa's Public Elementary and Secondary Enrollment Trends.- The University of Iowa College Of Education, Iowa City, Iowa. 1978.

From this brief look at the Iowa's reorganized school districts since 1966, the following summary statements can be made:

1. The 28 LEA's in Iowa which have joined in the last 15 years come from 15 counties and 19 Area Education Agencies. The joining high schools were generally ten miles or less from one another. Only one joining unit was in the southern half of Iowa (south of U.S. Highway 30), eight were in the north-west quarter (west of U.S. Highway 65), and five in the north-east quarter of the state.
2. Eighteen of the 28 districts had additional high schools within a ten mile radius, but local leaders, resources, and events helped the units decide which would combine.
3. All of the 28 LEA's had gone through one reorganization before. Four of the districts were Consolidated Districts and 24 were Community Districts. The majority of the Community Districts created before 1966 included more than two towns and more than two former high school districts.
4. The need for a K-12 enrollment of 300 students does not seem a significant factor, at present, in the creating or keeping of schools. This is demonstrated in part by the fact that 82 percent of the non-public elementary schools and 46 percent of the non-public high schools reported an estimated 1980-81 enrollment of less than 300. Only 5 non-public 1-12 units were listed in 1980-81 compared to 10 in 1972-73 and their enrollments ranged from 300-t00. In 1972 the DPI listed 274 non-public schools compared to 230 in 1980-81. In addition the Iowa Educational Directory 1980-81 also listed 52 non-approved schools. In 1980-81 the estimated enrollment of 58 of the 443 public school districts in Iowa was less than 300.
5. About two-thirds of the decisions of LEA's to join, made in the last 15 years came about in the last five years. There are many factors which will continue as pressures to bring about additional combinations in the next five years:
   a. The birth rates have remained low and K-12 enrollments will continue to decrease in the next five years.

b. While inflation may be no longer double digit, it will continue to increase school budgets along with pressure of professionals for cost of living plus salary adjustments.

c. Curriculum choices and other learning experiences will be limited in many high schools, when parents and youth are more than ever feeling the need for a wide range of subjects and activities.

d. Continued dependence on the annual legislation for increase in school funds from state sources will make many citizens feel they have no local control, but they can vote for or against joining another nearby school district or decide to send a child to a non-public school.

SOURCES:

1) Iowa Educational Directory 1980-81 School Year. Department of Public Instruction, State of Iowa, Des Moines. 1980 p 118.

2) Dreier, William H. The Community School District in Iowa. Extension Service, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, Iowa. 1967 p 16.

3) Ibid.

4) Hanson, Ellis. Planning for School District Organization in Iowa. Iowa Department of Public Instruction, Des Moines. 1967 p 41.

5) Dreier. p 18.

6) Sher, Jonathon and Tompkins, Rachel B. "Economy, Efficiency, and Equality: The Myths of Rural School and District Consolidation", Education in Rural America. Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado. 1977 p 43-80.

7) Jess, James. "Introduction to P.U.R.E." The Small School Forum, Vol. 2, No. 3. Spring 1981 p 1.

8) Ibid.

9) Peglow, Pam, Editor, "Population of Iowa: 1840 to 1970". Iowa Official Register. 56th Number. 1975-76 p 381.

10) Evans, Randy. "Iowa Gains 3 Percent, Census Finds". Des Moines Register, Wednesday, March 18, 1981.

11) Scoboda, Wayne and Evans, Randy. "Iowa Hamlets Hold Their Own: Census" Des Moines Sunday Register, August 3, 1980.

12) Truesdell, Wayne P. A Study of Iowa's Public Elementary and Secondary Enrollment Trends, The University of Iowa College of Education, Iowa City, Iowa. 1978.